

## The gift of Tsochen Man: private donations to national museums in Taiwan

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### Abstract

During the last century, the museumscape in Taiwan shifted from a Japanese-colonial via a sino-centric perspective to a Taiwanese one, the latter in combination with the rapid development of community-oriented local museums. By dealing with the rise and development of four of the most important public museums, this article defends the stance that private donations play a crucial role in the existence of public museums in Taiwan. The analysis focuses on the contemporary growth of the collections through donations. The theoretical perspective is informed by Krzysztof Pomian's distinction of museum origins, Stuart Plattner's analysis of private collectors' motivations, and Susan Pearce's idea about the transition of collectibles from the profane to the sacred realm.

**Key words:** Museum origins, Museums in Taiwan, National identity, Collecting, Donations.

### Models of museum origins and collectors' motivations

The French historian (of Polish origin) Krzysztof Pomian (1987, 2003) distinguishes four models in the origin of museums: the traditional model, the revolutionary model, the commercial model and, finally, that which I will call the model of the benefactor. In the traditional model, institutions such as churches, palaces, and universities opened up their collections to the public. The revolutionary model was a consequence of the centralization of state power, whereby the private collections of kings, emperors and churches were nationalized, such as the Louvre in France and, more recently, collections in the former Soviet Union and China. In the commercial model, the basis of the museum collection was the purchase of a private collection, such as in the case of the British Museum. In the benefactor model, a – usually well-to-do – individual has donated his or her private collection to the community.

Pomian's theoretical framework needs some comment. It explicitly does not propose a typology of existing museums, but a classification of their origins. In the course of their existence, *all* public museums enrich their collections through purchase (model 3), through donations (model 4), and eventually also via scientific research, such as the results of archaeological excavations. In this article, I will discuss this framework and illustrate it with empirical material about donations to major museums in Taiwan. The first two models constitute, according to Pomian, a minority in Europe and the United States of America, whilst model 2 would be absent in the Anglo-Saxon world. This is a contradiction in Pomian's text (1987:300) indeed: either the revolutionary model is absent (*'complètement absent'*) within the Anglo-Saxon world, or it is very rare (in the USA), but not both. The Louvre in Paris (1793), the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg (1917), the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul (1924) and the Palace Museum in Beijing (1925) have their origin in nationalist movements whereby the royal or imperial collection within the palace was transformed into a museum through a revolution (model 2). Then, the museum was both the incorporation of the memory of the kingdom or empire and a cultural and symbolic substratum that contributed to the construction of the nation state. Model 4 is dominant in the United States of America, but not in Europe. Pomian calls the fourth model 'evergetic' (*'évergétique'*; 1987:300), a neologism most probably derived from the Greek *euergetes* (and not to be found in current dictionaries), that refers to benefactors of

the city who enable the people to take advantage of their generous gift – and for this reason I translate this here as the ‘benefactor model’.

In his ethnography of the art market in the metropolitan area of St. Louis, Missouri, Stuart Plattner (1996), my second source of theoretical inspiration, distinguished three axes needed to understand collectors of high art: psychological, sociological and economic or, in other words, the motivations of ego-enlargement, augmentation of social status and investment. In accordance with this model but going further in the argument, I developed a configurational perspective on private collecting in general (Van der Grijp 2006, 2014b, 2015). Plattner’s three axes are important for the implication that in order to understand collecting as a cultural phenomenon, one cannot reduce the motivations of collectors to any one axis. The various motivational axes form a structural set, a configuration, which is to be understood as a process, a reconfiguration. However, for a full cultural understanding of collecting, it is necessary to add a fourth motivational axis, that of acquiring and transmitting knowledge about a certain category of objects, an axis that I call educational. My four motivational axes are all processual (i.e. to be understood as a process) and should be analyzed from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives – hence the complementary notions of configuration and reconfiguration. Here follows a brief explanation of the four axes.

According to Plattner, a psychological motivation can be characterized as ego-enlargement, by seeing one’s collection – especially when it is recognized as a ‘good’ and ‘important’ one – as an extension of oneself. I see another psychological dimension in nostalgia – a kind of restoration of a lost world by making it manageable, habitable and emotionally compelling within a sort of microcosm or time capsule. Often, psychologically or psychoanalytically inspired propositions such as those by Baudrillard (1968, 1994) and Muensterberger (1994), however, tend to reduce collecting to subjective values. They search for a mono-causal explanation and belittle collectors’ motives, for example by deeming collecting to be childish behavior. Baudrillard’s collector, in Naomi Schor’s lucid evaluation, is ‘a neurotic unable to cope with the struggles of intersubjectivity’ (1994: 257). For Muensterberger, ‘collectors share a sense of specialness, of once not having received satisfying love or attention or having been hurt or unfairly treated in infancy, and through their objects they feel reassured, enriched, and notable’ (1994:44). These negative hypotheses (the drive of collecting being identified as a lack) embody a mono-causal determinism diametrically opposed to a configurational approach to collectors’ motivations (Van der Grijp 2006: 14–21).

Sociological motivation may be summarized as a desire to augment one’s social status. Weber defined ‘motivation’ as ‘a complex of subjective meaning which seems to the actor himself [s/c] or to the observer an adequate ground for the conduct in question’ (1978: 11). However, he specifies, and I fully agree with this, that motivations are often half or even completely unconscious:

In the great majority of cases actual action goes on in a state of inarticulate half-consciousness or actual unconsciousness of its subjective meaning. The actor is more likely to “be aware” of it in a vague sense than he is to “know” what he is doing or be explicitly self-conscious about it. In most cases his action is governed by impulse or habit. (Weber 1978: 21).

Bourdieu on his turn demonstrated the direct link between the taste for aesthetics, art and ‘culture’ and social-economic backgrounds (1984: 326), in keeping with Veblen’s analysis of the non-working or only symbolically working leisure class. For Veblen, ‘the occupations of the [leisure] class... have the common economic characteristic of being non-industrial’ (1934: 21) and “leisure”... connotes... non-productive consumption of time’ (46). I argue that the creation of a serious collection equals – or at least represents – the production of culture. A collection is a social identity marker that provides (in Bourdieu’s terms) ‘cultural capital’ and augments the social status of the collector.

Collecting can also be, and often is, a form of economic investment. Collectors can sell some of their collectibles, generate profit and eventually reinvest this profit in their collection or in other undertakings. In so doing, they can accumulate a reserve of personal capital, and even become professional dealers (Van der Grijp, 2012). (The notion of profit may also be an economic metaphor that can be applied to the psychological and sociological drives: in that view,

ego-enlargement and the augmentation of social status could also be seen as forms of profit.)

The educational motive concerns acquiring and transmitting knowledge about a certain type of objects.<sup>1</sup> Collectors may assume that an increase in knowledge goes hand in hand with the ownership of the objects concerned. According to collectors I have interviewed (Van der Grijp 2006, 2009, 2012), daily and physical contact with their collectibles is a precondition for such knowledge. As collectors learn about their objects, many become knowledgeable specialists, and they are motivated to transmit their knowledge to others. (Here too, there is a kind of profit: that of knowledge about one's collectibles.) The configurational approach proposed here implies that in order to describe, understand and explain collecting as a cultural phenomenon, we should not reduce collectors' motivations to one, two or three motivations only, but rather take all four into account.

In 1990, Taiwan had 90 public museums, a number that increased quickly in the following years, as did the number of private museums. In 2000, there was a total of 400 public and private museums and, in 2007, 580 (Hwang 2009: 9). In 2009, the number of museums (private and public) had grown to 646 (Fung 2010: 6).<sup>2</sup> Here, I defend the thesis that private donations play a crucial role in the existence of public museums in Taiwan. The article deals with the rise and development of four of the most important public museums in Taiwan: the Taiwan National Museum; the National Palace Museum; the National Museum of Natural Science; and the National Prehistory Museum. The analysis, based on fieldwork between 2010 and 2014 (observation, interviews with museum professionals, etc.), focuses on the contemporary growth of the collections through donations.

### **Taiwan National Museum: The oldest one**

Before the fifteenth century, there probably was not much contact between Taiwan and mainland China, separated by the 120 km wide Taiwan Strait. From the fifteenth century, thousands of political refugees from the Chinese province of Fujian, Han Chinese, arrived in Taiwan, where they came in touch with the Austronesian speaking Aboriginal tribes living on the fertile western and south-western plains and with the semi-nomadic tribes on the central mountain chain. The Han Chinese immigrants spoke the Hoklo dialect, now indicated as 'Taiwanese'. At present, their descendants constitute about 70% of the population. In the seventeenth century, they were followed by Hakka Chinese who now constitute some 10 to 15% of the population. The remaining 12 to 15% are descendants from the Kuomintang refugees between 1945 and 1949 (Selya 2004). Most of the Austronesian speaking Aboriginals, less than 2% of the population, are now living in the counties of Hualien, Taitung and Nantou as well as on the slopes of the central mountain chain.

The Taiwan National Museum, with its long history starting in the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945), is to be found behind two copper buffalos at the end of the Guanqian Road that leads to Taipei's main railway station. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, Japan worked on the accelerated development of its colony Taiwan. Japan was responsible for building canals; the installation of water power plants; the construction of the north-south railway; a central financial institution, the Bank of Taiwan; a census of the entire population; standardization of money and measures and weights; the struggle against the opium trade; the constitution of commercial monopolies (of sugar, for example); in short, the basis of Taiwan's modern economy and infrastructure. All this made possible Taiwan's economic independence in 1905, but also the levying of commercial taxes and customs by the Japanese administration; in other words Taiwan became a source of profit for Japan.

By 1899, the Japanese administration had already organized the (colonial) Exposition of Taiwan with local products, from manufactured objects to artworks, in order to demonstrate the colony's success (Hu 2007). Later, more than half of these objects would constitute – via the traditional model in Pomian's terms – the basic collection of the first museum in Taiwan. In 1908, two years after the end of the mandate of the fourth Japanese Governor General, Gentaro Kodama (1852-1906), and his head of civil administration, Shinpei Goto (1857-1929), the north-south railway was opened. The colonial administration marked this success with the opening of the Kodama-Goto Memorial Museum which, in 1915, moved to its present location where, at that time, the Museum of the Governor General of Taiwan had been built.

This museum, designed by the Japanese architect Ichiro Nomura, is a rectangular building with rigorous symmetry inspired by the European Renaissance style that, in turn, had been inspired by ancient Greek Doric style with domes, triangular pediments and decorative pillars. Classic Greek temples constituted a human vision of eternity and a meeting point with the gods, conveying a sense of sacredness – this was also the case in similar museums elsewhere in the modern world (the British Museum for example) – in a dialogue between human civilization and the long time-span of history (Duncan 2005). In the Japanese perspective at the time, ideals of civilization and modernity were expressed in architecture inspired by the ancient Greeks. The museum is built of reinforced concrete and bricks, with floors and a staircase of marble and woodwork of Japanese pine and Taiwanese cypress, whilst the walls are adorned with stucco. Doric pillars support the 30-meter-high dome, with multi-coloured leaded windows in the central hall.

The museum collection of taxidermy animals, fossils, minerals, precious stones, and indigenous artefacts covered the fields of zoology, botany, geology and anthropology. Scientific research during the Japanese colonial period was concentrated in this museum, to which the Taihoku Imperial University in Taipei was added in 1928, with intensive interaction between the two institutions. During the colonial period, scientific research and museification had both economic and political functions: through the mapping of natural resources one took hold of the potential economic value (for large-scale exploitation) and, in a political respect, the museum instructed its visitors about the grandeur of the Japanese empire (Kano and Segewa 1945; Wu 2001). Moreover, the museum informed Japanese residents and tourists about the various places worth seeing in the colony. The 17 other museums from the Japanese period in Taiwan also had these functions.

During WWII, Japan had occupied the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) and assembled collections, some of which ended up in Taiwan. After the departure of the Japanese in 1945, the nationalist Kuomintang regime took over the museum of the Governor General and changed its name to the 'Provincial Museum', indicating that the Kuomintang regime considered Taiwan – re-baptized as the 'Republic of China' – as a province of (mainland) China, on which it still made a claim. After the departure of their colonial administration, the Japanese scientists, who were not private collectors but civil servants, left their collections behind in the museum. Taiwanese scientists and other museum workers took over their positions. One of the most important postwar anthropologists specializing in art and material culture, for example, was Chen Chi-liu (1968). Today, anthropological teaching and research are mainly concentrated in the Anthropology Department of the Taiwan National University and the Ethnology Department of the Academia Sinica.

Nowadays, the National Taiwan Museum has about 7,000 Taiwanese aboriginal artefacts and, thus, owns the world's largest such collection,<sup>3</sup> followed closely by the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka (Japan) with 5,000 Taiwanese aboriginal objects (Gao 2008: 51). The National Taiwan Museum owns an important collection of 15 shell bead garments. The shell beads were made by coastal aborigines, the Amis, and traded with mountain tribes. The textile fabric was made in the mountains and adorned with hundreds, sometimes thousands, of shell beads. This kind of prestige garment is no longer made today, and is only to be found in the hands of private collectors, who will not just give them away. In spite of the fact that the museum already has 15 garments with shell material, it continues to collect.<sup>4</sup> Wu Pai-lu, the anthropology curator, knows many collectors, some of whom specialize in this kind of garment. He visits them at home in order to look at those pieces. If he thinks that the quality is good, he invites specialists to pay a second visit in order to decide whether the garments are good enough for the museum to make a bid. Many items in the museum storerooms arrived there long ago and are fragile. The museum uses them for research and looks for new, more solid, garments for exhibition. The museum also possesses the oldest Latinized Taiwanese texts, in the form of mortgage bonds and sale contracts of the indigenous Siraya tribe on the south-western plains. During the Dutch colonial period (1624–1662), the (Dutch) missionaries Latinized the Siraya language in order to be able to Christianize the Siraya through bible texts. Moreover, they assisted the Siraya in recording their transactions with Han Chinese in Latinized script. Since then, the Siraya have maintained this Latinized system.<sup>5</sup> Today, the National Taiwan Museum aims to protect Taiwan's biodiversity and ethnic pluralism. The collection of more than 100,000

objects covers various categories, from natural sciences to history, prehistory and anthropology (Gao 2008: 50). The collection is extended via purchases and donations. Usually, 'these are old things that people no longer want to keep, which they give to the museum', as Li Tzu-ning, the Head of Collection Management, complains. He adds that such gifts are incidental and rarely constitute important pieces or collections:

During the Japanese period and thereafter, in comparison with America and European countries, Taiwan had no real tradition of donating private collections to museums. Only in the last few years, some private collectors have started to do so. But, then, what we receive is, for example, a stuffed bird, an old table, or a Buddha carving, but not a good carving. We have the image of being first and foremost a Museum of Natural History, and people do not want to donate an expensive artwork to that.<sup>6</sup> Li knows many private collectors, of aboriginal artefacts among other things, but the most important among them prefer to create their own private museums, such as the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines. Owners of ancient Chinese art prefer to donate to the National Palace Museum, while they may donate historical documents to the Taiwan Historica archives.

People who approach the museum with pieces they want to offer are referred to curator Wu Pai-lu. He then asks them if they want to sell or donate those pieces but, usually, they do not answer that question on the telephone, and often not during a first meeting either. He has to ask them explicitly, but most of them do not want to donate, only to sell.<sup>7</sup> His colleague Li Tzu-ning confirms this:

It's rare that people spontaneously come to the museum with a suitable donation. They come over, for example, with volumes of old newspapers and magazines. But that's of no interest for us. People don't know what we really would like to have. Often, we refuse donations. They only want to *sell* really interesting historical items. This is why we build our collection mainly through purchases.<sup>8</sup> In 2010, for example, the museum bought 200 picture postcards from the Japanese period from a collector-dealer (see Lin 2003). Previously, the museum paid no attention to such things, but today, curators think that they constitute good evidence of the past and, moreover, they are still relatively cheap.

However, in spite of these complaints from the museum side, there are also 'good' gifts from private collectors ending up in the museum. For example, the museum received from a private collector a partial, facial human skull, probably the oldest human fossil in Taiwan.<sup>9</sup> For many years, that collector had been searching for fossils around the river bed of the Tsailiao, which flows through Tsochen city in the Tainan district. Usually, he found animal fossils but, in the beginning of the 1970s, he chanced upon Taiwan's oldest human skull, the 'Tsochen Man', whose age is estimated at 25,000 to 30,000 years. Archaeologists had found fossils of the extinct Hayasakai rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sinensis hayasakai*) that would have lived between 450,000 and 900,000 years ago in the same area. They had established good ties with that collector, and he placed the fossil of the Tsochen Man at their disposal so reports about it could be published. But he kept the fossil in his own collection until he donated it to the museum.

Another example concerns an 80 year old former technician who had conducted geological surveys half a century ago. In 2008, he contacted the museum: he wanted to donate 38 measuring instruments, including a telescope and a scale. The museum staff took photos of them at his home and showed these to specialists in Taipei. The latter confirmed that the instruments had indeed been used for geological research in the past and that they are rare today. During a second visit, the museum staff accepted the donation.

Private collectors also lend pieces to the National Taiwan Museum. In 2005, for example, the museum organized 'Taiwan in Maps', a special exhibition on ancient maps. Li Tzu-ning had got to know several private collectors through their collectors' association, and had invited them to lend their maps for this exhibition. About half of the 300 exhibited maps came from those collectors, while the other half came from the existing museum holdings. One of the exhibited maps was a 5.36 metres long and 70 centimetres wide map of Taiwan on a silk roll,



which had been made between 1699 and 1704 by a Taiwanese craftsman by order of the censor Huang Shujing under the reign of the Kangxi Emperor (1662-1722) of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). The map was made in the style of Chinese landscape painting with images of Taiwan's mountains, rivers, roads, houses, and people. The half-naked people on the map represented indigenous populations, whilst the fully clad people were Chinese Han migrants. The map's perspective was sino-centric: as if one looked from the Qing court over the China Strait to Taiwan and approached the island from the west coast. The eastern part of Taiwan, east of the central mountain chain, was not represented.

After this exhibition, the museum was able to buy some of the exhibited maps from their owners. Li comments: 'They had developed a real passion for those ancient maps, and were also very keen to know what we had in stock'.<sup>10</sup> The exhibition showed the maps at their best, with adequate spot lights, and not rolled or folded in a cupboard. Moreover, the event provided publicity for those collectors, and enabled them to sell their ancient pieces for more money. Others too became aware of the fact that ancient maps can be interesting collectibles. An ancient map that, for example, sold for 1,000 NT\$ previously, would have been worth ten times as much afterwards.<sup>11</sup>

### **The National Palace Museum claiming to have the best pieces**

The National Palace Museum in Taipei is the fifth most visited museum in the world, after the Louvre in Paris, the British Museum in London, the Hermitage in St. Petersburg and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In 2008, for example, the National Palace Museum received 2.2 million visitors (Chung 2009: 13). It may be the world's number one museum of Chinese antiquities and is often compared with the Palace Museum in Beijing, from where the major part of its collection originates. The Palace Museum, opened in 1925 following the revolutionary model, is part of the Forbidden City, built in the fifteenth century (Hamlisch 2000). In 1931, when the Japanese threatened the Forbidden City, the collection was moved elsewhere. In 1948 and 1949, in its flight from Mainland China to Taiwan, the Kuomintang took along 608,985 museum pieces, 98 per cent of which (597,423 pieces) originated from the Palace Museum in Beijing.<sup>12</sup> The rest came from the Central Museum and other public institutions in Mainland China (Chung 2009: 13). In 1965, the National Palace Museum in Taipei opened, following what we may call an anti-revolutionary or flight model.

In an effort to re-sinicise the population after the lengthy Japanese colonial occupation, the nationalist regime of the Kuomintang obliged Taiwanese citizens to speak Mandarin Chinese. The themes of all cultural forms of expression including literature, newspapers, films, television and radio had to be in line with the Kuomintang ideology. Chinese ink paintings had higher prestige than Western or Japanese-style painting (Hwang 2011). During the first 15 years of the Kuomintang regime, 12 new museums opened, including the National Museum of History, the National Arts Education Centre and the National Taiwan Science Education Centre. The three latter museums were all within walking distance of the major primary and secondary schools in the capital Taipei, following the American example of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. A national museum quarter in view of the integration of formal schooling and public education would, according to the government, promote the national competitive force.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the economy flourished, and the population grew to 16 million. Thus, Taiwan became one of the richest countries in Asia – one of the 'four Asian tigers'. In 1971, after the People's Republic of China (on the mainland) joined the Security Council of the United Nations, Chiang Kai-shek withdrew his own Republic of China (Taiwan) from the Security Council. In 1979, the United States of America, until then still the biggest ally of the Republic of China (Taiwan), recognized the People's Republic of China (on the mainland). The official American attitude towards Taiwan was laid down in the Taiwan Relations Act. The United States still assured Taiwan of military protection against attacks from the Chinese mainland, but officially recognized Beijing as the only capital of China, including Taiwan.

In 1966, the People's Republic of China (on the mainland) initiated the Cultural Revolution, which aimed at the elimination of traditional values and traditions. As a reaction to this, the Kuomintang regime of the Republic of China (in Taiwan) introduced the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement, an aggressive promotion of traditional Chinese values and cultural

products. The 'reopening' of the National Palace Museum in 1965 was before the Cultural Revolution and the Cultural Renaissance Movement. This would constitute the living proof that the Republic of China valued traditional Chinese culture. Twenty other public museums opened between 1965 and 1975. Moreover, the Kuomintang regime subsidized the publication of classic Chinese literature, as well as school books that gave instruction in the (official) Chinese traditional culture, and it also subsidized community events based on that culture.

Today, the Palace Museum in Beijing claims to have a bigger collection but unarguably, the National Palace Museum in Taipei owns the best pieces. One example is the jadeite cabbage from the Qing dynasty, often compared with the Mona Lisa in the Louvre for its fame. Some of the c. 655,000 pieces in the museum's collection are 8,000 years old. The collection consists mainly of Chinese antiquities in bronze, ceramic, and porcelain, and paintings and books. More than half of the pieces in the latter category are archival documents from the Qing dynasty (Chung 2009: 13). The Kuomintang regime considered this collection as proof of its claim to be China's legitimate government as well as a powerful weapon in the process of forming the Taiwanese state (Cheng 2007: 22).

Initially, the museum entrance was decorated with a large statue of Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975), and the first objects that visitors encountered were bronze vessels from the Zhou dynasty (1045-256 BCE), this in order to emphasize the magnitude of Chinese culture (Varutti 2014:17-20). But since 1990, many Taiwanese have been resistant to the 'Chinese' identity imposed by the Chiang regime which is also expressed in the museum policy. Since its opening in 1965, 46,700 pieces have been added to the collection of the National Palace Museum through purchases and donations (Chung 2009: 13). The collection of the National Palace Museum is so vast that only a tiny part, some 15,000 objects, can be displayed in shifting temporary exhibitions. In 2003, for example, the National Palace Museum received a gift of hundreds of bronze, Buddhist objects from private collector Peng Kai-dong from Japan. It all started when Peng visited the museum and asked to speak to director Tu, and he said: 'I have a large collection of bronze which may be of interest to you'.<sup>13</sup> At the time, Peng was already an old man and he had his own family, but they lived in Japan. At the age of 15, he migrated with his mother to Japan. His father was Japanese, but Peng himself had Taiwanese nationality. Later, having become rich through his successful jewellery business, Peng was able to create an important collection. Because he was Taiwanese, Peng wanted his collection to end up in the National Palace Museum. He sold 32 pieces to the museum, donated 358 other pieces (Chung 2009: 13), and asked the museum to reserve a separate room for his collection. The museum did so because of the high quality of the collection, according to Lee Saalih.<sup>14</sup> On his death in 2006, Peng bequeathed another 48 pieces to the museum. Now, the legacy contains 450 antique Buddhist artworks from India, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Japan, Korea and China. Until August 2009, the collection was exhibited in a room carrying Peng's name in the National Palace Museum.

Since the beginning of this century, in particular since government approval in 2004, the National Palace Museum has been developing plans to open a branch with the name 'Museum of Asian Art and Culture' in Taibao City in the southern district of Chiayi. In 2010, there was, as yet, no museum building, but there was a fifth precursor exhibition (i.e. before the actual opening of the museum) on Buddhist art, including 70 pieces from Peng's legacy. The new museum has a more international ambition than the National Palace Museum – not only China – and works at the creation of a proper collection which, in 2010, already contained 2,000 pieces (Marcout 2010:21). The museum has its own budget in order to purchase pieces from private collectors as well as via auction houses.<sup>15</sup> The museum also receives donations from private collectors. Chou Kung-hsin, the former director of the National Palace Museum in Taipei, cites, for example, a gift of 80 pieces of Japanese lacquer ware produced by three generations of artists from the same family (*ibid.*). Several exhibitions on Asian textiles, Buddhist art, jade, porcelain, and tea culture have been organized in the National Palace Museum's southern branch in Chiayi County already due to these kinds of donations, including Peng's. This southern branch is to be opened ('test-operated') under the motto 'The Gateway to Asia' at the end of 2015 with permanent exhibits on Buddhist art in Asia, national styles in textile art, and the art of tea, among other themes.

### Gift from Max Liu Chi-wei to the National Museum of Natural Sciences

Another large museum in Taiwan is the National Museum of Natural Science in Taichung, a big city in the west of the country. This museum follows the classic American model of the Smithsonian Institution, which integrates the culture of 'tribal' peoples in natural history and has a special Anthropology Department consisting of an archaeological and an ethnological section. The museum opened in 1986, and now owns 1,300,000 pieces, including 80,000 ethnographic artefacts. These are mainly from Taiwanese aboriginals and Taiwanese (Han) Chinese, including a complete Buddhist temple. The large number of natural history pieces consists largely of insects. The National Museum of Natural Science received an important gift from Max Liu Chi-wei (1911-2002), a well-known painter and writer in Taiwan who also made donations to other public museums (see, for example, Hsueh and Wen 2001). Below, I will deal with the background of this particular gift.

In 1993, Max Liu Chi-wei, accompanied by his son ('Nelson') Liu Nin-sheng, travelled to Papua New Guinea. The Taiwan Art Foundation, a private foundation of one of his friends, an art gallery owner, sponsored the voyage. For a long time, Max Liu Chi-wei had been in touch with the Taiwan Art Foundation, a kind of 'Friends of the Museum', in this case of the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts in Taichung. With the sponsorship money, they were able to fly to Port Moresby and visit certain islands as well as the Highlands, and also collect artefacts. Liu Nin-sheng mentioned a figure of 40,000 NT\$,<sup>16</sup> whilst Wang Sung-shan, the former Director Anthropology of the National Science Museum in Taichung, spoke about 2 million NT\$.<sup>17</sup> To me, the first amount seems too low and the second improbably high for such an expedition. Travelling in 'exotic' countries provided Max Liu Chi-wei with artistic inspiration for his painting (Van der Grijp 2009) and also constituted the basis for his so-called anthropological books. So-called, because professional anthropologists do not consider them as serious anthropology. I think, however, that Max Liu Chi-wei as a painter was original, rich in variety, and sublime. At his departure for New Guinea, Max Liu Chi-wei was an old but energetic man, according to Wang Sung-shan.<sup>18</sup> During this last voyage, they bartered mosquito gauze, knives and cigarettes for indigenous artworks. In Port Moresby, they bought pieces at trading stations. The largest objects were an outrigger canoe and fire dance masks. Smaller items included pottery and shell bracelets. Just before their departure, they bartered their generator for other artworks.<sup>19</sup> Max Liu Chi-wei had also collected artefacts during earlier voyages; he would have received them as gifts from members of the indigenous populations. He donated this earlier collection of some 20 pieces of aboriginal work to the Ethnology Museum of the Academia Sinica, since he did not have the space to exhibit all the artefacts in his home.<sup>20</sup> His son Nin-sheng does not see his father as a collector, because he did not collect for his own pleasure: 'It wasn't his hobby, like some Chinese collect jade or antiques. Often, that's accompanied by financial interests. My father was only interested in the culture. That's different.'<sup>21</sup> According to his son, Max Liu Chi-wei was not keen on private ownership of tribal art, and thought it better to share with others the pieces collected in New Guinea, as well as the knowledge and pleasure they brought. The aim of the voyage was not to collect art but, as his son Liu Nin-sheng explains:

When you're there, it's difficult not to collect. We knew, of course, that we would encounter those kind of things, but we hadn't thought at all about the problem of how we could get such a collection out of the country. You can't just put those pieces in your airplane luggage. They were too big and fragile for that.<sup>22</sup> While there, they discovered how much good material there was, and they decided to ship it to Taiwan in a 24-foot container.

Back again in Taiwan, Max Liu Chi-wei offered the collected objects to the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, but that museum refused the donation because, from the museum's point of view, those objects were not art, at least not the kind of fine art it was accustomed to exhibit. Previously, after his return from a voyage through Bali and the Philippines, Max Liu Chi-wei had been in touch with the National Museum of Natural Science in Taichung. When this museum wanted to organize an exhibition on the Pacific Islands, his donation of 365 pieces was more than welcome. He also donated part of his extensive book collection to this museum. Later, the rest of his books went to the National Prehistory Museum in Taitung, as



did his collection of photos. According to his son, Max Liu Chi-wei had always collected books, which he moved from Japan to the Chinese mainland and next to Taiwan.<sup>23</sup>

After the death of Max Liu Chi-wei in 2002, the curator wanted to integrate the substantial gift into a permanent Oceania exhibition. Max Liu Chi-wei's pieces, however, came mainly from Papua New Guinea and not from Pacific islands with Austronesian speaking populations. In order to complete the collection with material from other parts of Melanesia and Polynesia, the museum bought 38 extra pieces, such as shell money from the Solomon Islands, from tribal art galleries in Paris and California.

### **A gift from Japan to the National Prehistory Museum**

In 2008, the National Prehistory Museum in Taitung (in the southeast of Taiwan) received an important gift from Yoshichika Iwasa (born in 1922). It concerned ethnographic and other material from the South Pacific, a donation about which I had read in the Taiwanese press and about which I wanted to know the details, in particular because it included Polynesian artefacts (Van der Grijp 2014a). In 2011, when I was invited to give a guest lecture at the National Prehistory Museum in Taitung, I not only obtained that information, but I was also allowed to study, in the stores, the entire collection, which appeared to be much larger than I had initially presumed. For the museum staff, the history started with a Japanese researcher, Sakamoto Isamu, who visited the museum in search of prehistoric evidence about tapa (painted bark cloth) in Taiwan. On his return to Osaka, Sakamoto Isamu sent an email to curator Fang Chun-wei with the information that there was an older collector in Japan, Yoshichika Iwasa, who might be willing to donate the ten pieces of tapa that he had in his office.

In 2007, a delegation of five staff members of the National Prehistory Museum visited Iwasa in Tokyo. The fact that the museum director was part of that delegation appeared to be an important argument for Iwasa – he found that quite an honour, according to curator Fang Chun-wei.<sup>24</sup> The initial project for the mission was to search for collections of artefacts made by Taiwanese aboriginal peoples built up during the colonial period in Japanese institutions, for example in the National University of Tokyo and the Ethnological Museum in Osaka. The visit to Iwasa was part of the mission, and he told them the following story.

In 1959, he went to Polynesia for the first time as part of a research team from a Japanese university and financially supported by a Japanese firm. He would return there 49 times (*sic*), and published a book on the indigenous languages of South Pacific islands. The museum staff could not give me further details about this book in Japanese. I observed that the last mint postage stamp in Iwasa's collection, probably bought in a local post office in the South Pacific, dates from 1995, which most likely corresponds with his last voyage, thus at the age of 73 years. Initially, Iwasa wanted to build a museum in Japan for the artefacts he collected on the islands. However, after the economic crisis in Japan, he became aware that this was beyond his reach. He got in touch with the Ethnology Museum in Osaka and the National University in Tokyo to negotiate a donation of his collection, but these institutions only appeared to be interested in a part of his collection. Iwasa wanted his collection to end up as a whole in an institution, and not divided in separate parts.

During this first visit, in 2007, Iwasa promised to donate his collection to the National Prehistory Museum. The museum hired a Japanese removal company to ship the collection to Taiwan and, in March 2008, the major part of the collection had arrived in the museum. Curator Fang Chun-wei recalled:

In Tokyo, Iwasa only had a small office, and the major part of his collection had been packed already. We only saw that major part when it arrived here. We didn't know him well, neither did we know his collection. I was quite curious to see what would come out of all those boxes when they arrived.<sup>25</sup> Before his collection was shipped to the National Prehistory Museum, the museum staff had only seen the 'anthropological' objects in Iwasa's office: tapa and war clubs. These were in the first two shipments to the museum. But Iwasa had not talked about the stamps and coins stored in his home and which came over in the third shipment. Probably, as a collector, Iwasa intended to unite various dimensions of socio-cultural life in the South Pacific. His total collection consists of 20,000

objects in the following categories: 340 pieces of tapa, mainly from Fiji, Tonga and other parts of Polynesia; some other ethnographic artefacts such as tapa beaters and war clubs; 1,228 books, newspapers and other documents on the South Pacific; 3,300 mint stamps from South Pacific island states; coins; picture postcards, slides and photos; and natural specimens such as shells. Thus, the donation was rather heterogeneous and included ethnographic material, natural history, numismatics, philately, and printed documentation.

Curator Fang Chun-wei presumes that Iwasa himself made a distinction between the anthropological collection in his office and his collections of stamps and coins at home. The latter part of the collection does not at all correspond with the central theme – expressed in the name – of the museum, ‘prehistory’. In response to my question whether he, as a curator, is happy with this philatelic and numismatic part of the collection, Fang Chun-wei does not give a direct answer. However, he does admit that the museum has no personnel to deal adequately with that part of the collection. He still thinks that, for a good understanding of Iwasa’s collecting activities, it is important also to preserve that part of the collection.<sup>26</sup> Iwasa did not provide any information about the creation of his collection, but he gave his private correspondence and note books (in Japanese) to the museum and these still have to be studied in the future. In the first exhibition of Iwasa’s collection in 2008, the museum exhibited 88 pieces. A second exhibition in 2009–2010, ‘Oceanian Paradise: Exhibition for the Iwasa Yoshichika Collection’, which included fishing tools, musical instruments, shell money, tapa, maps, coins and postage stamps, was much larger (300 objects). After that second exhibition, the museum published a catalogue of the tapa collection (Chang Chi-shan 2011), which anticipated a third exhibition in 2013–2014 entitled ‘Love for Austronesian Cultures: Yoshichika Iwasa and his Collections’.<sup>27</sup> The National Prehistory Museum also received other donations. In 2003, for example, an anonymous collector wanted to sell his important archaeological collection to the museum but, finally, gave it as a donation. After his death a short time later, the museum still handed one million NT\$ to his family. The public, however, was informed that it concerned a donation.<sup>28</sup> In 2006, a second example, the widow of the first ‘indigenous’ (aboriginal) general in Taiwan (the third in rank in the Taiwanese army) donated her late husband’s uniform, photos and personal archive to the museum. In 2008, a third example, a Swiss Catholic organization donated the architectural drawings for a church in east Taitung. Recording the history of the region around Taitung is part of the museum’s objectives. In 2009, a fourth example, a daughter of another Japanese collector, Dr. Isoriwara, gave her father’s archaeological collection to the museum after his death. She did so, according to my informants, because she did not know what else to do with it, and also because she thought that the museum could better manage the collection.

Apart from donations, there are collectors who have their collection conserved by the National Prehistory Museum for free. Contracts are renewed every year in which the museum guarantees good conditions of conservation. A priest from Switzerland, for example, is an amateur collector of ethnographic and archaeological objects about which he writes articles. Curator Fang Chun-wei: ‘Some collectors want to sell things that we don’t want to buy, and they also don’t want to give them to the museum. Handing over entire or partial collections to the museum in order to have these conserved is an intermediate form between selling and donating.’ Until recently, according to Fang Chun-wei, the museum collection was ‘not yet very large’ and, consequently, the museum could offer storage space to others.<sup>29</sup> Now, this is going to change.

## Conclusions

In the course of their existence, public museums in Taiwan, like those elsewhere in the world, have enriched their collections through purchases and donations which, in line with Pomian (1987, 2003), follow respectively the commercial model and the benefactor model. This article has focused on the latter dimension, donations, by means of four case studies of major museums in Taiwan. Taiwan’s oldest museum, which celebrated its centennial in 2012, was – via the traditional model – founded in the Japanese colonial period and, after independence (in 1945), passed into the hands of the new government, which changed its name to the

Provincial Museum initially and, in 1999, to the National Taiwan Museum. Here, as we have seen in the examples, extension of the collection happens through purchases, donations, and scientific research (archaeological excavations among other things). Although leading museum staff members complain about the absence of important donations, they still give some clear examples of these, such as the gift by a private collector of the oldest known human fossil in Taiwan, the facial skull part of the Tsochen Man, possibly 30,000 years old. However, this ancient human fossil does not seem to be considered as a major donation to the preserved Taiwanese cultural heritage (donations would be 'incidental and rarely constitute important pieces', as one staff member quoted above expresses it).<sup>30</sup> This paradox may be explained, I hypothesize, by the fact that the Tsochen Man fossil does not belong to an ancestor of the vast majority of the actual Taiwanese population, which descends from the Chinese mainland. The origin of the National Palace Museum, in 1925, followed the revolutionary model as far as this concerned the Chinese Mainland. However, the transition of parts of this world-class collection from the mainland to Taiwan in 1948-1949, i.e. the origin of this museum *in* Taiwan, is beyond the scope of Pomian's four models. We could call it an anti-revolutionary model or even a flight model, but in any case, it is unique to the Taiwanese situation. The existing collection, which is a major focus of a political-ideological identity struggle ('Chinese' versus 'Taiwanese'), is extended through donations, among other things. Of importance – also in political-ideological and identity respects – is the well-advanced project for the opening of a branch in the southern district of Chiayi, which is not only focused on (Mainland) Chinese art, but on Asian art and culture in general. The third and fourth case studies of the National Museum of Natural Science in Taichung and the relatively young National Prehistory Museum in Taitung demonstrate the crucial importance of gifts for the extension of their collections and, with this, their own survival. Several museums such as the National History Museum (in Taipei) and Taiwan Historica (in Nantou City) regularly organize special exhibitions of private collections. The special exhibition of a private collection of large stone lions in the museum of Taiwan Historica in 2012 (12 January - 26 March) had cost the museum 'only' 120,000 NT\$ (= 2,486 British Pound or 3,448 Euro), a relatively low figure of which the then head of the Exhibition Department of Taiwan Historica, Huang Hung-sen, was very proud.<sup>31</sup>

The importance of donations for Taiwanese museums varies according to the size and status of the original collection. In the case of the National Taiwan Museum and the National Palace Museum the original collections, respectively inherited from the Japanese colonial occupants or taken away from mainland China, were already large and significant. Donations still enrich the existing collections, but we cannot really say that these museums 'depend on donations'. This is different in relatively new museums such as the National Museum of Natural Science and the National Prehistory Museum, where donations are crucial for collection development. This also explains why it is less easy for the latter type of museums to apply the principle of cherry picking.

Another question concerns the motivations of donors or, more in general, the relation between private and public collectors. It is difficult to answer the first part of this question here in a genuine anthropological way, since we have no first-hand information from the donors concerned – the closest we come is the son and co-traveler of Max Liu Chi-wei. The relation between private collectors and museums is asymmetrical because private collectors are individuals, sometimes couples, and museums are institutions. Characteristic of private collections is the uncertainty of their longevity in relation to the owner's circumstances. Public collections, i.e. those that are open to the general public (also including libraries and botanical gardens, for example), usually continue their existence regardless of the death, retirement, or transfer of their initiator or administrator (director or curator). Via a donation of their collection to a museum before or, by will, after their death, private collectors can address any uncertainty about the disposition of their collection and may extend its lifespan far beyond the end of their own life. Collectors donate to museums because the latter represent the imagined community (in the sense of Anderson [1983]) as a whole.

Apart from three exceptions, the donors in my examples have Taiwanese nationality or, in the case of Peng Kai-dong who lives in Japan, at least a Taiwanese origin. Their imagined community may be identified as the Taiwanese nation, hence their gifts to national museums. The three exceptions concern donations to the National Prehistory Museum. The Swiss Catholic

organization – not really a ‘private collector’ indeed – probably gave the architectural drawings of the church in Taitung to the (prehistory) museum in that place because that was in line with its general objectives. For this organization, the church itself also had been a kind of gift to the Catholic community in Taitung. Concerning the daughter of the Japanese collector Isoriwa, the available information is insufficient to make a clear observation different from the ones already cited. I suppose, but this is only a guess, that the archaeological collection originated from the Taitung region, and that it seems the most logical thing to return it to the archaeological museum of that region. The case of the Japanese collector Yoshichika Iwasa is quite different, since his collection originates from the South Pacific. It was Iwasa’s first choice to donate his entire collection to his imaginary community represented by national institutions in Japan (in Tokyo and Osaka), but these institutions only wanted to pick the cherries out of his collection. The visit by the Taiwanese museum staff was an unexpected and probably last chance for the – in 2008 86 years old – Iwasa to keep his entire collection together. We should also remember that Taiwan was a colonial part of Japan during the first 23 years of Iwasa’s life.

I hypothesize that the donation of one’s collection to a museum is, from the collector’s point of view, a sacred gift – sacred in the sense of ‘set apart’ (Pearce 1995: 24, 406-408) – that transcends the collector’s lifespan and implies a superior form of communication with the rest of the world. This hypothesis is in line with Pearce’s idea that ‘collections are gathered together for purposes which are seen by their possessors as lifting them away from the world of common commodities into one of special significance, one for which “sacred” seems the right word’ (Pearce 1995: 27; see also Van der Grijp 2014b). The difference between donations to museums on the one hand and common wills and bequests to one person or a few family members on the other is that such donations are given to the imagined community as a whole. Moreover, these gifts are not restricted to the period after the collector’s death, since many donations are given by collectors while they are still alive and well. In all these cases, the point is that they find a supreme solution for coping with the idea of their own mortality.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Previously, I labeled this drive the ‘cognitive motive’ (Van der Grijp 2006: 13). I now prefer the adjective ‘educational’ in order to better distinguish it from the psychological motive.
- <sup>2</sup> See also Gao (2009, 2013); Lee (2012); Trémon (2012); Tsai (2009); Vickers (2009, 2010); for a comparison with China see (Varutti (2014), and with both China and Japan see Chang Wan-chen (2012).
- <sup>3</sup> Personal communication Li Tzu-ning, Head of Collection Management National Taiwan Museum, Taipei, 3 March 2012.
- <sup>4</sup> Personal communication Wu Pai-lu, National Taiwan Museum, Taipei, 10 March 2011.
- <sup>5</sup> To this date, however, the Siraya have not yet been officially recognized as an indigenous (‘aboriginal’) group by the Taiwanese government.
- <sup>6</sup> Personal communication Li Tzu-ning, Taipei, 19 March 2011.
- <sup>7</sup> Personal communication Wu Pai-lu, 2011.
- <sup>8</sup> Personal communication, 2011.
- <sup>9</sup> Personal communication Li Tzu-ning, 2011.
- <sup>10</sup> Personal communication Li Tzu-ning, 2011.
- <sup>11</sup> The national currency is the New Taiwan Dollar (NT\$). NT\$ 1 = British Pound 0.02; and NT\$ 1 = Euro 0.03, on 16 June 2015.

- <sup>12</sup> For detailed studies see Shambaugh-Elliott and Shambaugh (2007), and (Chan 2012).
- <sup>13</sup> Personal communication Lee Saalih, Director of the Taiwan Folk Art Museum in Beitou, Taipei, 4 March 2011. From 2001 to 2006, Lee Saalih worked as Head of the Department of Exhibition and Education in the National Palace Museum.
- <sup>14</sup> Personal communication, 2011.
- <sup>15</sup> In 2010, for example, its acquisition budget was 240 million NT\$ (Marcout 2010: 21).
- <sup>16</sup> Personal communication Liu Nin-sheng, son of Max Liu Chi-wei, Taipei, 12 February 2010.
- <sup>17</sup> Personal communication Taipei, 9 March 2011. At present, Wang Sung-shan is Dean of the School of Culture Resources, Taipei National University of the Arts.<sup>18</sup> Personal communication, 2011.
- <sup>19</sup> Personal communication Liu Nin-sheng, 2010.
- <sup>20</sup> Personal communication Hsu Shan-hui, Collection Manager Museum of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taipei, 24 April 2013.
- <sup>21</sup> Personal communication, 2010.
- <sup>22</sup> Personal communication, 2010.
- <sup>23</sup> Personal communication, 2010.<sup>24</sup> Personal communication Fang Chun-wei, Curator National Prehistory Museum, Taitung, 16 March 2011.
- <sup>25</sup> Personal communication, 2011.
- <sup>26</sup> Personal communication, 2011.
- <sup>27</sup> In 2010, the new museum director, Mr. Tong, had gone to Japan to present Iwasa with a donation contract to be signed.
- <sup>28</sup> Source: collective interview with museum staff Yang Cheng-hsien, Wu I-lin, Huang Yu-lun, and Chang Chi-shan, National Prehistory Museum, Taitung, 15 March 2011. This interview is also the source of the other examples below.
- <sup>29</sup> Personal communication, 2011.
- <sup>30</sup> Personal communication Li Tzu-ning, 2011.
- <sup>31</sup> Personal communication Huang Hung-sen, Nantou, 19 April 2013.

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